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THE PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION¹

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This association, so far as I know its history, was formed in 1903. There were at that time two associations known as parents' associations, one connected with the Laboratory School, and the other with the Elementary School of the University of Chicago. The earliest association, of which I shall speak—that of the Laboratory School—which is now a constituent part of this one, was intimately connected with elementary education in the University almost from the beginning. I speak of this one more fully than of the other because better acquainted with it, and I shall leave someone else, with more complete knowledge than I have, to bring the other one into proper relation with the present organization. I should say it was in the early 90's that Dr. Dewey conceived the idea of an elementary laboratory school which should be almost wholly experimental in its nature, and in connection with which he might work out some notions relative to pedagogy. Dr. Harper once told me that this school was instituted upon the basis of an expenditure of at most \$1,000 or \$1,200, and I think that at the time I first became acquainted with the school it had not more than twenty or thirty children in attendance and those, of course, in the very first grades. The first sessions of this little school were held in a few rented rooms

¹ President's address before the Parents' Association of the School of Education of the University of Chicago, November 18, 1909.

for a time; a little later, on account of the increase in numbers, it was removed to a rather large dwelling-house on Ellis Avenue. During this time the school was known as the Elementary School of the University of Chicago. Shortly after the year 1900 what was commonly called the Blaine School with its elementary department was brought over from the North Side, together with its excellent faculty and its forceful and resourceful leader, Colonel Parker. At about the same time the South Side Academy and the Chicago Manual Training School joined the procession. From that time the School of Education began to take shape, and its elementary department took the name of the Elementary School of the University of Chicago, the entire School of Education being then under the leadership of Colonel Parker. At this juncture a somewhat delicate question arose as to whether or not the little school of a hundred or more children on Ellis Avenue should or could maintain a separate existence. This was finally resolved in favor of continuing the school for a time at least and until certain expected results, wholly educational, might be reached. The school then took on the name of the Laboratory School of the University of Chicago, and was supported, I think wholly, and I know very largely, by private subscription during the school years of 1901-2 and 1902-3. The death of Colonel Parker at that time resulted in Dr. Dewey being made director of the School of Education, and also resulted in the Laboratory School uniting with the Elementary School; out of this junction and the uniting of the Manual Training School with the South Side Academy as the University High School arose the present parents' association. It will thus readily be seen that in their inception the earlier parents' associations were as elementary as the schools were.

Now to go back to the little school begun in the early 90's. The methods of its teachings were not very well understood by other than the psychologists and philosophers of pedagogy. The ideas underlying the methods were even less understood than the methods themselves. By many they were deemed freakish and by all unusual. The generation of grown-up persons of that day had in their youth known no method of acquiring knowledge

except from one in authority. It was a sort of fiat knowledge, enforced by vigorous language, if nothing worse, and the idea of acquisition because of the pleasure of acquisition was entertained by few, and I think I may say had been assimilated by none. Attractiveness of presentation and the sweet reasonableness of learning for its own sake were as unknown to the youth of my day as the *macropetalichthys*, and him or it we did not know at all. A lesson was a task, and worse than all it was called a task; and the taskmaster was the schoolmaster. Words are little things, but they do sometimes picture a situation. Wisdom's ways were not always ways of pleasantness, nor were all her paths paths of peace. In the days of which I speak schooling was a preparation for life as sharpening the sword was a preparation for battle. It was not life itself, and was scarcely any part of it. And here I think was the parting of the ways. But we did not know much about the new way. It had never occurred to many, I think, that the school life of a child was part of the sum total of all life, with its sunshine and its showers, its social and emotional, its intellectual and physical enjoyments, all in the budding, perhaps one may say, but all as real to these young people as were or are the weightier affairs of life that fall upon their elders. This was, in very brief outline, a new thought, and here were all these precious possibilities to be drawn out, guided, and perfected, to the end that there might be unity of the whole life and that no sudden hiatus might intervene between the preparation for and the undertaking of life's occupations. As I have said before, we knew little of these things; and so there were installed very early in the history of this little school what were known as mothers' meetings, held in the afternoons of certain days of the week. These mothers were learning the ways of the school as well as its necessities. In the very early days the groups were so small as to give little social life, but the mothers were learning and helping; were seeing results and believing in them; were directing social advance along the lines of democracy and simplicity, and were justifying to themselves the conceptions of Dr. Dewey's well-ordered mind. To paraphrase Webster in the great Dartmouth College case: It was

a small school, but there were those who loved it. And for the purpose of accomplishing these things, and for the purpose of ascertaining and furnishing, so far as might be, the necessary funds and equipment, the parents' association of which I speak was first formed and organized in the Ellis Avenue school in 1901. Of the work of that association I need say but little, except that this was really a formative period in which the parents were partaking largely of the lives of their children and learning their necessities.

As you will see from a glance at the present calendar this association which is now in existence was formed in the year 1903. It was very early seen and believed by the parents that if this present school was to be a school simply and nothing else, was to be like other schools and not different, there was no reason for its existence. Committees were formed for the purpose of expressing and carrying out the ideas of the parents with reference particularly to the social life of the children. The association very early in its history became rather well known over the entire educational world, better known, I think, in foreign countries and other states than at home. I have been asked to explain the workings of this association upon the banks of the Thames, the banks of the Seine, and the shores of the Bodensee. One officer of this association has been asked to address an educational congress in Belgium, and the Argentine Republic has asked for a complete set of its literature. I think I may say, however, without violating any confidence, that the fame of the association has far outstripped its achievements; but nevertheless it has achieved something. In the very first year of its organization it submitted in writing to the dean the views of the high-school committees with reference to certain things as follows. I quote:

1. We urge the building, at the earliest date possible of a students' clubhouse and the development of genuine club life. Until this is done we ask for the setting apart of several rooms in the present building for this purpose, and we offer to assist in fitting them up and caring for them properly. We urge that this club idea be developed in the spirit of true democracy, with freedom of forming and leaving groups of friends and under the becoming supervision of the faculty.

I am glad to report to you that this has been done. The clubhouse itself has not been built, but the club idea has been fostered, and there has been, and I believe there is now, a flourishing boys' club being conducted along the lines laid down.

2. We urge the institution and development of many clubs of special interest, debating, literary, musical, art, dancing, outing, etc. We ask that these interests be frequently presented to students in public assemblies and their social side made attractive. We hereby offer to assist in finding money, meeting-places, and chaperones to begin and carry on this work.

I am glad to report to you that many of these things have been done. There is a lively and flourishing debating-club. There have been musical clubs of various sorts, and still are. There have been dancing-clubs and other organizations, and still are. There have been outing-clubs for taking cross-country walks and such things, but this is a matter which should be further developed.

As to the other part—the offer to assist in finding money—I am glad to say to you that through the social fund the parents contributed to the Elementary School during the last year: for dancing, \$950; for special parties, \$70; for grade parties, \$50; for the spring festival, \$80; and to the High School: for the *University High School Daily*, \$750; for a teacher of dancing, \$600; for music, \$100; for the dramatic club, \$50; for the debating-club, \$150; for the purpose of parties, \$200; and for athletics, \$900; thus fulfilling splendidly the offer made in the first year of this association to furnish funds in whole or in part for the activities urged upon the faculties of these schools.

3. We offer to conduct many social parties at our houses during the season and so to co-operate that all students may be reached. We ask the authorities to regard this as a part of their interest, to advise with us as to the best methods of doing it and of how to make it satisfy the social needs of the students.

4. We urge the continuation and development of the afternoon school parties and dances. We rejoice in their simplicity and informality. We suggest the division of their attendance into several groups so as to throw together those of similar ages and interests.

5. We urge the school not to permit the formation of formal fraternities and societies, because the social good they accomplish is bought at too high a price in waste of time, in social fixation, and in the creation of a

spirit of pride and a consequent damage to those who are not members, the prevention of freedom of social movement, and in the love of the school as a whole which is the first need of the young people.

These things, so recommended, have been to a large extent, if not wholly, accomplished, and so I think I may say that the Parents' Association has not been wholly devoid of achievement. There are other problems to be settled, and I hope that during this coming year the committees of this association will ascertain the things now most needed and that we may take up in some formal way their accomplishment. It may seem to some who have listened to this address that I regard the parents as the whole thing; but not so. We owe whatever we may have accomplished largely to the faithful directors and deans and the faithful faculties of the schools, many members of which have made places for themselves in the educational world, "not only in things written and said but by the arduous greatness of things done."